

EXHIBIT 15
DATE 01-10-07
HB 2

Madam Chair and members of the committee:

My name is Matthew Stewart. I was born and raised in Great Falls, MT. At the age of twenty one I am the youngest of my graduating class of peer support specialists. I have been to Warm Springs and was there for approximately three months. I live with three diagnoses, which goes to show that mental illness does not discriminate against different age groups. I am an accomplished classical pianist/neo-Romantic composer and an artist. I've lived with mental illness all my life, and in retrospect, my recovery, like my fellow peers, is nothing short of remarkable.

I was diagnosed at the age of four with several psychiatric disorders. My life during that time was a roller coaster ride of medication adjustments, psychiatry sessions, etc. However, in October of 2003 my symptoms got markedly worse, and towards the end of that year they were exacerbated by me coming out as being gay. I had to deal with the dual stigma of being a homosexual and having a mental illness. I got kicked out of my parents' house at the age of nineteen and things went from bad to worse. I attempted suicide, in May of 2005, and got sent to Warm Springs after being in the hospital for two weeks. I got out in August of 2005.

The turning point came when my job coach asked me if I'd be interested in helping out at a conference. I said sure. As it turns out, this conference would further enhance my recovery and give me something I'd lost a long time ago, hope. I got myself enrolled in Wellness Recovery Action Planning or W.R.A.P. for short. I graduated from that, and proceeded to take the Peer Employment Training. When I walked into that class, I felt like I was surrounded by family. Indeed, we are all on our journey to recovery. I realized through this program that I am not my diagnosis, and recovery is entirely possible. My goal in life is now to work towards eliminating stigma in mental health community and the gay and lesbian community respectively.

Thank you for your time.
